

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Banking and Insurance Committee

BILL: SB 1596

INTRODUCER: Senator Alexander

SUBJECT: Insurance Fraud

DATE: March 27, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Emrich	Deffenbaugh	BI	Favorable
2.			HE	
3.			CJ	
4.			GE	
5.			GA	
6.				

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 1596 amends provisions of the Insurance Code pertaining to insurance fraud. The bill does the following:

- Provides that it is a second degree felony for a person to organize, plan or knowingly participate in a scheme to create documentation of a motor vehicle crash that did not occur ("paper" or "phantom" accident) and provides for a two year minimum mandatory term of imprisonment;
- Provides that it is a third-degree felony for insurance agents, adjusters, customer representatives and others to transact insurance without a license;
- Provides that it is a third-degree felony to solicit or receive a commission, bonus, kickback or bribe in return for accepting treatment from a health care provider or health care facility;
- Clarifies that kickbacks for patient referrals are illegal whether the patient is being referred to or from a health care provider or facility;
- Provides that it is a third-degree felony for a person to willfully violate an emergency rule or order of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), the Office of Insurance Regulation, or the Financial Services Commission (Governor and Cabinet); however, such penalties would not apply to licensees or affiliated parties of licensees;
- Provides that falsely personating an officer of the DFS is a third-degree felony;
- Requires the Division of Insurance Fraud (DIF) to deposit revenues received from criminal proceedings or forfeiture proceedings into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund to be used to carry out the division's responsibilities;
- Requires health care clinics to post anti-fraud reward signs in conspicuous locations and allows full and complete access to such facilities by Division of Insurance Fraud authorized employees to make unannounced inspections to ensure compliance;

- Clarifies what is meant by independent procurement of coverage to state that independent procurement of coverage is coverage by an unauthorized insurer legitimately licensed in another state or country;
- Requires insurers, upon receiving notice of a claim, to notify insureds or persons for whom a claim for reimbursement for diagnosis or treatment of injuries has been filed, that the DFS may pay rewards of up to \$25,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing specified crimes investigated by the DIF;
- Requires drivers to pay an additional fee (\$180) when seeking reinstatement of their drivers license if such license was suspended or revoked due to the driver being convicted of specified insurance fraud crimes;
- Provides that a drivers license must be revoked based upon such drivers conviction of specified insurance fraud crimes;
- Deletes a criminal penalty which makes it a first-degree misdemeanor to violate a stop work order issued by DFS under the workers' compensation law. This provision is in conflict with a penalty currently provided under s. 440.105(4)(b)8, F.S., which makes a violation of a stop work order a third degree felony;
- Requires insurers to timely submit acceptable anti-fraud plans or anti-fraud investigative descriptions with DIF and provides for an administrative fine;
- Clarifies creating, marketing or presenting false or fraudulent proof of motor vehicle insurance; and,
- Provides that the law relating to fraudulently obtaining goods or services does not apply to investigative actions by law enforcement officers.

This bill amends ss. 322.21, 322.26, 400.9935, 440.105, 456.054, 624.112, 626.938, 626.9891, 626.9893, 627.736, 817.234, 817.2361, 817.50, 817.505, 843.08, and 932.7055, F.S., and creates s. 626.9893, F.S.

II. Present Situation:

Division of Insurance Fraud

The primary agency established to investigate motor vehicle as well as all insurance fraud is the Division of Insurance Fraud (DIF) which employs 171 persons, of which 128 are sworn law enforcement officers, in regional offices statewide. Founded in 1976, the Division's sworn personnel investigate all types of criminal insurance fraud under s. 626.989, F.S. Division officers may make warrantless arrests upon probable cause for criminal violations established as a result of an investigation. The general laws applicable to arrests by state law enforcement officers apply to DIF investigators.

According to DIF officers, Florida's insurance laws are being exploited by sophisticated criminal organizations in schemes that involve health care clinic fraud, staging (faking) car crashes, manufacturing false crash reports, adding occupants to existing crash reports, filing personal injury protection (PIP) claims using contrived injuries, colluding with dishonest medical treatment providers to fraudulently bill insurance companies for medically unnecessary or non-existent treatments, and patient-brokering (referring patients to medical providers for a bounty).

Insurance companies authorized to do business in Florida and other specified persons must report suspected fraud to the DIF and are protected from civil liability, provided the information is reported in good faith. Further, insurers are required to adopt anti-fraud plans and to establish and maintain anti-fraud units within their companies to investigate insurance fraud under s. 626.9891, F.S.

Officials with the DIF assert that they are one of the few law enforcement organizations in state government that does not have a forfeiture fund. Such funds are used to purchase special equipment and other non-budgeted items that enhance an agency's ability to detect crime and enforce criminal laws. According to these officials, the existence of the fund creates a great incentive for investigators to pursue forfeiture actions in conjunction with their cases. Presently, the Division deposits all revenues gained from state forfeiture actions into the state's General Revenue fund.

The law provides for an Anti-Fraud Reward Program to be established within DFS which is funded from the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund.¹ Under the program, DFS may pay rewards of up to \$25,000 to persons providing information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing crimes investigated by DIF arising from specified violations. Only a single reward amount may be paid out for claims arising from the same transaction.

Drivers License Fees

Under current law, any person who applies for reinstatement following the suspension or revocation of the person's drivers license (DL) must pay the Department of Highway and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) a service fee of \$35 following a suspension, and \$60 following a revocation, which is in addition to the fee for a license.² The DHSMV subsequently deposits portions of these fees into the General Revenue Fund and the Highway Safety Operating Trust Fund.

Under s. 322.26, F.S., the DHSMV is mandated to revoke a person's DL if such person is convicted of specified motor vehicle related crimes including murder or manslaughter resulting from the operation of a motor vehicle, any felony in the commission of which a motor vehicle is used, perjury or statement under oath to the DHSMV relating to the ownership or operation of motor vehicles, or other specified crimes.

Worker's Compensation

Any person or entity defined as an employer by ch. 440, F.S., is required to provide workers' compensation coverage to its employees. The workers' compensation system provides indemnity and medical benefits to injured employees. In order for an employee to be entitled to workers' compensation benefits, the law requires that the injury "arise out of" and be in the course and scope of the employment.³ Presently there are two conflicting criminal penalties under the law pertaining to employers knowingly violating a stop-work order issued by the DFS (one penalty makes it a first-degree misdemeanor to violate a stop-work order under s. 400.105(2), F.S., and the other penalty makes a violation of a stop work order a third-degree felony under

¹ Section 626.9892, F.S.

² Section 322.21, F.S.

³ Section 440.9935, F.S.

s. 440.105(4), F.S.

Health Care Clinics

Health care clinics are regulated under part XIII of ch. 400, F.S., by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA). AHCA currently licenses approximately 2,435 health care clinics statewide. However, about 4,590 clinics are exempt from licensure and are therefore subject to no regulation under the clinic law.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1. Amends 322.21, F.S., pertaining to driver's license (DL) fees, by requiring that a driver pay an additional fee of \$180 if the driver seeks to have his or her DL reinstated and if such license was previously suspended or revoked due to the driver being convicted of one of three crimes: patient brokering under s. 817.505, F.S.; solicitation under s. 817.234(8), F.S.; or participating in a staged motor vehicle accident under s. 817.234(9), F.S. The additional fee would be deposited in the Highway Safety Operating Trust Fund at the time of reinstatement. The DFS asserts that this proposal is a way to provide a significant disincentive for persons to commit these types of motor vehicle related crimes.

Section 2. Amends s. 322.26, F.S., pertaining to the mandatory revocation of a DL by the DHSMV based upon conviction of specified offenses. The bill adds convictions for patient brokering under s. 817.505, F.S.; solicitation under s. 817.234(8), F.S.; or participating in a staged motor vehicle accident under s. 817.234(9), F.S., to the list of such offenses.

Section 3. Amends s. 400.9935, F.S., pertaining to responsibilities of a health care clinic. The bill requires every clinic licensed under the Health Care Clinic Act (Part XIII of Chapter 400, F.S.) to post a "reward" sign in a conspicuous location readily visible to patients indicating that under s. 626.9892, F.S., the DFS may pay rewards of up to \$25,000 to persons providing information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing crimes investigated by Division of Insurance Fraud (DIF) arising from the following violations:

- s. 440.105, F.S., relating to prohibited activities under the workers' compensation law;
- s. 624.15, F.S., relating to general penalties for willful violations of the Insurance Code;
- s. 626.9541, F.S., relating to unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts under the Insurance Code;
- s. 626.989, F.S., relating to resisting an arrest or otherwise interfering with DIF investigators;
or
- s. 817.234, F.S., relating to false and fraudulent insurance claims.

The bill provides that "authorized employees" of DIF would have the authority to make unannounced inspections of licensed clinics as necessary to determine whether the clinic is in compliance with the signage provisions and requires clinics to allow full and complete access to such DIF employees. It is unclear whether the term authorized employees could mean sworn law enforcement personnel could inspect clinics. Also, this inspection provision is in addition to the inspection authority currently granted AHCA under s. 400.9915, F.S.

Section 4. Amends s. 440.105(2)(a), F.S., pertaining to prohibited activities under the Worker's Compensation law. The bill strikes a criminal penalty provision which makes it a first-degree misdemeanor to violate a stop-work order issued by DFS because there is a duplicative provision which makes it a third-degree felony to violate such an order under s. 440.105(4)(b)8, F.S.

Section 5. Amends s. 456.054, F.S., relating to prohibited kickbacks. The bill clarifies the definition of kickback by deleting obsolete language and providing that a kickback means a remuneration or payment by or on behalf of a provider of health care services or items to any person as an incentive or inducement to refer patients for past or future services or items, when the payment is not tax deductible as an ordinary and necessary expense. According to officers with the DIF, the existing definition is limited in its application and is not used by law enforcement detectives or prosecutors tasked with the responsibility of enforcing the provision.

Section 6. Amends s. 624.15, F.S., which establishes general penalties under the Insurance Code. The bill would make it a misdemeanor of the second-degree (unless otherwise specifically provided by statute) to willfully violate a *rule* of the DFS, Office of Insurance Regulation, or Financial Services Commission. The bill would also make each willful violation of an *emergency rule or order* of the DFS, OIR, or FSC by a person who is not licensed, authorized, or eligible to engage in business in accordance with the Insurance Code, a third-degree felony. Each instance of such violation is a separate offense. However, this provision would not apply to licensees or affiliated parties of licensees.

According to DIF officers, these provisions would allow DIF investigators to enforce violations of Department rule the same way they may currently enforce violations of the Insurance Code. Also, making a violation of an emergency rule or order a felony would enhance enforcement authority for DIF during the aftermath of hurricanes because emergency rules and orders are oftentimes issued by the Financial Services Commission after such natural disasters.

Section 7. Amends s. 626.112, F.S., relating to licensing requirements for agents, adjusters, and other licensees who transact insurance without a license. Specifically, the bill provides that any such agent, adjuster, or other licensee who knowingly transacts insurance or engages in insurance activities in Florida without a license commits a third-degree felony.

Section 8. Amends s. 626.938, F.S., pertaining to reporting and taxing of independently procured coverages. The law currently allows persons in Florida to independently procure insurance from foreign (out of state) or alien (out of country) insurers that do not hold a Florida certificate of authority and to pay all necessary taxes and fees. The bill clarifies that any insurance on a risk located in Florida in an unauthorized insurer legitimately licensed in another state or country procured through solicitations occurring or made outside Florida is deemed to be insurance procured within this state. This clarification is necessary because some unauthorized insurers have asserted the defense that they are soliciting or selling independently procured coverage and therefore are not in violation of the provisions of the Florida Insurance Code pertaining to unauthorized entities. The bill also provides that independently procured coverage may not be secured for workers' compensation insurance.

Section 9. Amends s. 626.9891, F.S., pertaining to insurer anti-fraud investigative plans and units. Current law allows the DFS to impose an administrative fine up to \$2,000 a day for an insurer that fails to submit a final anti-fraud plan or otherwise fails to implement such plan, fails to implement the provisions of a plan or an anti-fraud investigative unit, or otherwise refuses to comply with the requirements of this section. This bill would clarify this requirement by specifying the insurer must “timely” submit an “acceptable” anti-fraud plan or unit “description” to the “office or commission,” in addition to the department. The bill clarifies that the department, office, or commission may impose an administrative fine of up to \$2,000 for failure of an insurer to “submit an acceptable” plan or unit description, until the department, office, or commission deems the insurer in compliance.

The bill also allows the DFS to impose another administrative fine (amount unspecified) against an insurer that fails to implement or follow the provisions of an anti-fraud plan or anti-fraud investigative unit description. According to DIF officials, the authority to impose a more significant fine would create an incentive for insurers to implement and follow the provisions of their fraud plans or investigative units.

Section 10. Creates s. 626.9893, F.S., relating to criminal forfeiture proceedings and disposition of revenues. The bill provides that the Division may deposit revenues received as a result of criminal or forfeiture proceedings, other than revenues deposited into the Department of Financial Services’ Federal Equitable Sharing Trust Fund under s. 17.43, F.S., into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund. Moneys deposited must be separately accounted for and used solely for DIF to carry out its responsibilities. The bill further provides that, notwithstanding ss. 216.301, F.S., and 216.351, F.S., any balance of moneys deposited that remain at the end of any fiscal year must remain in the Trust Fund at the end of that year and shall be available for the Division.

Section 11. Amends s. 627.736, F.S., pertaining to personal injury protection (PIP) motor vehicle insurance. The bill requires that an insurer, upon receiving notice of a claim, must provide notice to the insured, or the person for whom a claim for reimbursement for diagnosis or treatment of injuries has been filed, that the DFS may pay rewards of up to \$25,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing specified crimes investigated by the DIF. The enumerating crimes are:

- s. 440.105, F.S., relating to prohibited activities under the workers’ compensation law;
- s. 624.15, F.S., relating to general penalties for willful violations of the Insurance Code;
- s. 626.9541, F.S., relating to unfair methods of competition and unfair or deceptive acts under the Insurance Code;
- s. 626.989, F.S., relating to resisting an arrest or otherwise interfering with DIF investigators;
or
- s. 817.234, F.S., relating to false and fraudulent insurance claims.

The notice would also provide that solicitation of a person involved in a motor vehicle crash may be in violation of s. 817.234, F.S., (false insurance claims) or s. 817.505, F.S., (patient brokering) or rules related by the Florida Bar, and should be reported immediately to the DIF, if such conduct has taken place.

Section 12. Amends s. 817.234, F.S., pertaining to the false and fraudulent insurance claims law. The bill clarifies that any “service” provider (except a hospital) who waives deductibles or copayments as a general business practice commits insurance fraud. The proposal also deletes the term “patient” and inserts the term “insured” to designate the person for whom, or entity for which, a service provider would agree to waive deductibles or copayments. The bill makes it a second-degree felony (with a two-year minimum mandatory term of imprisonment) to plan or organize a “scheme to create documentation of a motor vehicle crash that did not occur” for purposes of a tort claim or for PIP benefits. This penalty currently applies to “staged accidents.” According to representatives with DFS, criminalizing the activities of intentionally causing a “paper accident” would help deter motor vehicle insurance fraud.

Section 13. Amends s. 817.2361, F.S., relating to false or fraudulent motor vehicle insurance. Current law makes it a third-degree felony to create, market, or present a false or fraudulent “insurance card.” The bill deletes the term “card” and expands the applicability of the statute to provide that any person who presents false or fraudulent “proof of” motor vehicle insurance commits a third-degree felony.

Section 14. Amends s. 817.50, F.S., pertaining to fraudulently obtaining goods and services from a health care provider. Under current law, if a person provides a health care provider with a false name or address or assigns to any provider the proceeds of any health maintenance contract or insurance contract, knowing that such contract is invalid, such action shall be prima facie evidence of the intent to defraud such provider. The bill adds language to protect investigators engaged in undercover police investigations. It provides that the law does not apply to investigative actions taken by law enforcement officers for law enforcement purposes in the course of their official duties. This provision will help DIF investigators because it would solve the potential problem of having any criminal case dismissed in court where a pretext policy was issued by an insurer for DIF as part of the investigation against a health care provider.

Section 15. Amends s. 817.505, F.S., relating to patient brokering. The bill clarifies that it is a third-degree felony for any person, including health care provider or facility, to offer to pay any commission, bonus, rebate, kickback, or bribe in cash or in kind, or engage in a split-fee arrangement in any form whatsoever, to induce the referral of patients “to or” from a health care provider or facility. The bill also clarifies that it is a third-degree felony to solicit or receive any commission, bonus, rebate, kickback, or bribe in cash or in kind, or engage in a split-fee arrangement in any form whatsoever, in return for referring patients to “or from” a health care provider or facility. Also, the legislation adds a similar provision making it a third-degree felony for any person, including any health care provider or facility to “solicit or receive any commission... in any form, in return for the acceptance or acknowledgment of treatment from a health care provider or health care facility.”

The bill expands the terms “health care provider or health care facility” to mean any person “required to be licensed, certified, or registered; or lawfully exempt from being required to be licensed, certified or registered” with AHCA and the Department of Health.

Section 16. Amends s. 843.08, F.S., pertaining to falsely personating an officer. Currently, it is a third-degree felony to falsely assume or pretend to be a specified law enforcement officer. The bill extends this penalty to the impersonation of an officer of DFS.

Section 17. Amends s. 932.7055, F.S., relating to disposition of liens and forfeited property, to provide that if the seizing agency is the Division of Insurance Fraud of the Department of Financial Services, the proceeds accrued pursuant to the provisions of the Florida Contraband Forfeiture Act shall be deposited into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund as provided in s. 626.9893, F.S., or into the Department of Financial Services' Federal Equitable Sharing Trust Fund as provided in s. 17.43, F.S., as applicable.

Section 18. Provides for severability of the provisions of the bill. If any provision of the bill is held invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this legislation.

Section 19. Provides an effective date of July 1, 2006.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The overall impact of this bill should be to reduce insurance loss costs and premiums attributable to insurance fraud.

Persons would be subject to specified penalties, including criminal prosecution, for various acts specified by the bill.

Health care clinics will be responsible for placing anti-fraud reward signs in conspicuous locations within their clinics and must allow complete access to their premises to

“authorized employees” with the Fraud Division to make inspections to determine compliance with the signage requirement.

There may be administrative expenses to insurers in complying with the additional policyholder notice requirement under the bill.

C. Government Sector Impact:

Representatives with DFS stated that the responsibilities set forth in the bill will be carried out within the existing resources of the agency. The DIF has not estimated at this time how much revenue will be received due to administrative fines imposed against insurers for failing to submit acceptable anti-fraud plans or anti-fraud unit descriptions.

The Criminal Justice Estimating Conference states that the penalty provisions of this legislation have an indeterminate, but likely insignificant, prison bed impact.

It is not known how much moneys would be deposited by the Division of Insurance Fraud into the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund as a result of criminal proceedings or forfeiture proceedings under the bill. Such amounts are currently deposited into the General Revenue Fund.

The bill proposes a new surcharge (\$180) when persons convicted on specific insurance fraud offenses seeks reinstatement of their suspended or revoked driver's license. Representatives with the DHSMV state that the amount to be collected is “indeterminate” since the number of such convictions is unknown.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
